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304 are no better informed on the subject. They only know that this custom was handed down to them from their ancestors, and that is sufficient.

[531] I saw not only a cross marked on the foreheads of all the Abipones, but likewise black crosses woven in the red woollen garments of many. It is a very surprizing circumstance that they did this before they were acquainted with the religion of Christ, when the signification and merits of the cross were unknown to them. Perhaps they learnt some veneration for the cross, or gained an idea of its possessing great virtues from their Spanish captives, or from those Abipones who had lived in captivity amongst the Spaniards.

The Abiponian women, not content with the marks common to both sexes, have their face, breast, and arms covered with black figures of various shapes, so that they present the appearance of a Turkish carpet. The higher their [554] rank, and the greater their beauty, the more figures they have; but this savage ornament is purchased with much blood and many groans. As soon as a young woman is of age to be married she is ordered to be marked according to custom. She reclines her head upon the lap of an old woman, and is pricked in order to be beautified. Thorns are used for a pencil, and

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ashes mixed with blood for paint. The ingenious, but cruel old woman, sticking the points of the thorns deep into the flesh, describes various figures till the whole face streams with blood. If the wretched girl does but groan, or draw her face away, she is loaded with reproaches, taunts and abuse. "No more of such cowardice," exclaims the old woman in a rage, "you are a disgrace to our nation, since a little tickling with thorns is so intolerable to you! Do you not know that you are descended from those who glory and delight in wounds? For shame of yourself, you faint-hearted creature! You seem to be softer than cotton. You will die single, be assured. Which of our heroes would think so cowardly a girl worthy to be his wife? But if you will only be quiet and tractable, I'll make you more beautiful than beauty itself." Terrified by these vociferations, and fearful of becoming the jest and derision of her companions, the girl does not utter a word, but conceals the sense of pain in silence, and with a cheerful countenance, and lips unclosed through dread of reproach, endures the torture of the thorns, which is not finished in one day. The first day she is sent home with her face half pricked with the thorns, and is recalled the next, the next after that, and perhaps oftener, to have the rest of her face, her breast and arms

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pricked in like manner. Meantime she is shut up for several days in her father's tent, and wrapped in a hide that she may receive no injury from the cold air. Carefully abstaining from meat, fishes, and some other sorts of food, she feeds upon nothing but a little fruit which grows upon brambles, and, though frequently known to produce ague, conduces much towards cooling the blood.

The long fast, together with the daily effusion of blood, renders the young girls extremely pale. The chin is not dotted like the other parts, but pierced with one stroke of the thorn in straight lines, upon which musical characters might be written. All thorns seem to have a poisonous quality, and consequently, from being scratched with them, the eyes, cheeks, and lips are horridly swelled, and imbibe a deep black from the ashes placed on the wounded skin; so that a girl, upon leaving the house of that barbarous old woman, looks like a Stygian fury, and forces you involuntarily to exclaim, *Oh! quantum Niobe Niobe distabat ab illâ!* The savage parents themselves are sometimes moved to pity at the sight of her, but never dream of abolishing this cruel custom; for they think their daughters are ornamented by being thus mangled, and at the same time instructed and prepared to bear the pains of parturition in future. Though I de-